1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

sary to understand the attitude of the Bella Coola to the sexual act itself. Although it is a normal part of life (for no one would voluntarily abstain from all contact) yet the union of man and woman does not lack import, since its very humanness distinguishes those who practise it in the eyes of supernatural beings, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic. Those who indulge excessively become so over-charged with this characteristic that their undertakings are certain to fail, whereas those who remain continent for a considerable period are so freed from the contagion of mankind that they become almost supernatural themselves and always succeed in their ventures. If, after a period of restraint, a man holds intercourse, this essentially human act adds typical human strength to that accumulated by chastity. Chastity alone gives power; but chastity consummated by intercourse at the proper period increases that power enormously. This somewhat complicated belief is accepted without question by every Bella Coola, playing an important part in their lives, even in their present degraded condition. The following story illustrates the point rather clearly:

A party of Kingcome Inlet people had been present at a ceremonial at Smith Inlet. While returning home, one canoe, containing a chief, his wife, and eighteen or twenty commoners, was caught by an unexpected south wind and driven on the rocky islet, *Sno-ahddāy*, where the lighthouse now stands. The occupants managed to reach shore and to save their canoe. The islet was barren, but they made a rude shelter of boughs in which they lived while the storm continued. Every day the chief sent out the young men to hunt seals, and every day they returned empty-handed. The little food they had with them on landing was now exhausted and they were starving. One night, when they were almost famished, the chief said to his wife:

"The youths have done their best. Now that death is before us I want to create a kindly feeling. I am going out, probably to die during the night, and I want you to allow each young man to sleep with you. It is a strange request but our condition is unusual, and the story of your shame will never be known, because we shall soon all be dead."

The wife acquiesced. The chief then told one of the young commoners to lie with her, and afterwards to tell a comrade to do likewise,

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

539 who, in turn, would pass on the request so that it might reach each
831 member of the party. Not only is it contrary to custom for a commoner
785 to hold intercourse with a chief's wife, but it is unknown for a man to
ask another to sleep with his wife, so the youth was surprised and rather
[837] frightened. However, he acceded to the request, passed on the instruc-
[622] tions, and washed. As he was bathing, a seal appeared in the surf beside
him, and he was able to kill it easily. Each in turn behaved in the same
manner, washed, and then killed a seal. Next morning, when the chief
returned he was delighted that all had turned out in accordance with his
hopes. At the same time the wind dropped so that the party was able
to return home.

831 The power which had brought the seals within reach of the
785 men had been engendered in their own bodies by these ritual
acts after a rather lengthy period of continence. The Bella
Coola believe that such a procedure always increases their
strength and ability, therefore giving them a better chance to
gain favour from supernatural beings, and to take advantage
of opportunities offered. Hunters in particular are careful with
[224] regard to their marital life since animals know their acts and
[825] thoughts, and hide from one who has not made himself "clean"
[783] by continence, its termination, and bathing. *Sxetsta* consists
of these three elements, but since continence is the most pro-
minent feature, the term may be translated as "ceremonial
chastity."

In its simplest form this comprises merely the three ele-
ments already mentioned. The longer the continence, the
greater the power engendered by its termination. A man who
has practised abstinence for a year has such strength within
himself that almost any good fortune may occur, and cases
are known in which it has been carried out for even longer
periods. More often, an individual practises ceremonial chas-
[184] tity in accordance with a family tradition. One old man gave
the following recipe and was most emphatic that it always
224 brought success in hunting and fishing; he added that on the
785 two occasions he had tried it, he had brought back a pheno-
menal number of skins.

A person planning to set out on an expedition for any pur-

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

224 785 sible, selecting small twigs from which the bark and spines have been rubbed off. This acts as an emetic, so that before washing in the morning he has vomited from his stomach all [824] polluting matter, especially any human hair which animals [278] consider particularly unclean. Before dawn he goes to the [783] river and remains beneath the surface as long as possible, irrespective of the coldness of the water. Then he returns slowly to his house. Four nights later the same acts are repeated. These eight nights of continence are followed by two further periods, each of four nights, making a total of sixteen. Thus fortified, a hunter anticipates great success.

785 A person practising ceremonial chastity is in a condition peculiarly susceptible to disaster, and must observe certain restrictions. If, for example, anyone sees him as he returns from washing in the morning, the power which he has been accumulating so laboriously is lost. Owing to this belief, it is customary for a man to wash long before dawn and to come creeping into his house through a hole in the floor. He must always be the last to retire at night, the first to rise in the morning; and he must say nothing about what he is doing. Intercourse is, of course, absolutely forbidden except on the proper nights, and at other times he must not even put his arm around his wife. [837] Failure to obey these restrictions destroys any advantage from ceremonial chastity, while actual disaster follows should a man's wife misconduct herself with anyone else when he is using her for this purpose. If she is unfaithful, her husband is certain to be slain by an animal when hunting, or to slip and be killed on a mountain trail. Animals know all that human beings do [825] or think, and they punish anyone who is unable to perform ceremonial chastity fittingly. Behind these restrictions there 831 is undoubtedly the sentiment that intercourse, held duly and 785 properly at the right time, is not a mere desire of the flesh, but a ceremonial act. Indeed, when the Bella Coola speak of it in [833] connection with ceremonial chastity, they do not use the [195] common term, *s-m*, which has a coarse implication, but *xoldjut* which has a polite and almost sacred implication.

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NEó Bellacoola NEó

[567] friends, a further cause for their preferential treatment. A [727] Bella Coola who had been enslaved and ransomed had to [783] undergo a cleansing ceremony to remove the taint of slavery before he could take part in the ceremonies of the community. It was impossible to learn the details of this rite.

[624] A master had complete power over a slave, unaffected by the force of public opinion, since the affairs of a slave, being without relatives, were of no consequence to anyone. Accordingly, the lot of a slave depended on the character of his master, and on his own ability and industry. An industrious slave was valued; such an one would not be traded or sold except through dire necessity, and in course of years he became, as far as actual treatment was concerned, one of the [424] family. Many masters gave their slaves *kusiat*[41] dance pre- [431] rogatives, expending large sums for the purpose. In such a case the slave might become an influential member of the community, though the fact that he was not free was never forgotten. On the other hand, a master had not the slightest compunction about beating a lazy slave, and could kill him if he so desired. None of the present Bella Coola has heard of such a case; it was considered more sensible to sell or give away an unsatisfactory slave. It was accepted as a matter of course that a master should provide his slaves with food and clothing, since anything produced or obtained by one belonged to him. A slave-owner had full rights to his female slaves, [837] and unquestionably exercised them. The only restraints were the jealousy of his own wife, or wives, and the feeling that it was undignified for a free man to demean himself. It was impossible to learn with even approximate accuracy to what extent intercourse took place between masters and slaves. Probably not a great deal, though there was considerable freedom of relations between slave women and the young men of the community, unrestrained by the pride of chieftainship. When a slave had been faithful for a number of years and had [582] become almost a member of the family, his master would try

[41] Kusiat privileges (I, p. 180) were more rarely given.

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

593 slave, and this is believed to have occurred on one occasion
567 to the daughter of a chief.

432 Once, many hundred years ago, the daughter of a Bella Coola chief
148 was married to the son of *Tsaxtexwam*, a Bella Bella chief, living at *Qoqoyd*. At the marriage, in Bella Coola, valuable presents were given by both families, and the girl went to live in Bella Bella with her husband. Some ten years later, *Tsaxtexwam* gave a large potlatch to which he had invited guests from all parts of the coast. As in duty bound, his daughter-in-law's relatives gave a certain amount of goods to rebuy her. They were not wealthy, so that the contribution was of small value. *Tsaxtexwam* had expected a larger present, and now found himself unable even to repay his debts to those who had assembled. He did not immediately show his resentment, but soon afterwards sold his daughter-in-law as slave to a Kitkatla chief. The Bella Coola were justly indignant, but could not make up their minds what to do in such an unprecedented case. The girl ultimately escaped and made her way home after lengthy wanderings (II, p. 505).

837 A husband demands faithfulness on the part of his wife, though he himself is often rather lax. Illicit intercourse is regarded, not as a deadly sin, but as an infringement of the husband's prerogatives. But if a woman should bear a child at a time when it was impossible for the husband to have been the father, due to absence, he would probably accept it as his [582] own and do no more than administer a beating, though some jealous men would divorce a wife for this. Bella Coola sentiment on such matters varies with the individual; it is universally considered to be a matter that concerns the husband [184] alone and he can do as he thinks fit. The daughters of chiefs are usually faithful to their husbands, whereas those of poorer persons, unrestrained by the valuables expended at their mar- [582] riages, are more lax. If the husband should catch an adulterer, he can, if bold, slay him on the spot and the exaction of blood revenge would be uncalled for. Usually a fight ends the matter, though the offender's family may give presents to the aggrieved husband, and his wife's relatives may also make donations to atone for their daughter's failings. A husband does not share his wife with anyone, and a question as to the lending of a wife

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

to a guest was regarded as amusing. In recent years, however, some husbands have made a practice of renting their wives to white men. This is not considered creditable, but the Bella Coola do not strongly condemn breaches of the moral code, which are regarded as the affair of the husband alone. There is said to be a Bella Bella custom by which a wife takes as recognized paramour one of the friends of her husband who is thought not only to know of this but to receive the presents which the lover gives his wife. The two continue to be friends and often hunt together; in fact, their mutual interest in the woman is a bond between them. No trace of this practice could be found in Bella Coola.

POLYGAMY

It has thus far been assumed that the Bella Coola are monogamous, an assumption correct only since the period of white dominance. Previous to that time it was quite common for wealthy men to have three, four, or more wives. *Pottes*, the important chief so often mentioned, had nine, ten, or eleven, the exact number is not known. A man wishing to take a second wife could do so in the manner already described, although the period of engagement was usually much shorter, and working for his parents-in-law was not expected. The reason for this was obvious to the Bella Coola. None but a chief of importance could afford more than a single wife, and such an one could not be expected to demean himself by working for anyone else. Besides, parents were glad to have their daughters married to a great chief, so willingly omitted the customary period of servitude. Few attained the distinction of having several wives. As far as could be learnt, the number of the sexes seems always to have been about equal, in itself a check to polygyny in a community where practically every adult had a wife. A number of males were always slain in war, and it is to be assumed that polygyny was made possible only through the surplus of women thus caused. The great majority of men had a single wife, some chiefs had

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

ceremony, they can part at discretion without anyone being affected. 586

When a wife runs away and seeks refuge with another man, her husband sometimes tries to kill his rival, but frequently both families endeavour to heal the breach amicably. Some of her relatives, particularly those who played an influential part in the marriage, first ask the husband whether or not he is willing to take her back. If the answer is in the affirmative, they next try to persuade her to return. Every argument is used, in many cases combined with threats against her seducer, and the intermediaries often succeed. But she must never go back without presents, "to dry with fire the water that has entered the marriage." Her husband invites all his fellow-villagers to his house to a ceremony which is said "to uproot the house [of trouble]." The singers are in attendance and sing in succession many *kusiut* songs, followed by *ɬɬaok* songs, and to each the owner of the song dances, but since the supernatural beings are not present, the affair is of a non-sacred nature. The goods received from the family of the erring wife are distributed and the matter is at an end. Those who persuaded the wife to return are especially rewarded. 837 [796] [431]

If the faithless wife should refuse to return, or if she should bear a child to her lover, reconciliation is not possible. Then it is incumbent on the woman's relatives to return to the husband as much goods as he has expended, with additions if they wish to uphold their own reputation. If the husband is clearly to blame, or if he is the deserting partner, his wife's family are not required to return the gifts they have received. There is no judicial tribunal of any kind, the force of public opinion alone impels restitution if the offender wishes to maintain his reputation in the community. Acting on this principle, the relatives of a deserted wife sometimes restore to her husband's family the presents they have received, thereby demonstrating their nobility and at the same time shaming the offender. 586 837 [626]

Formerly there was an elaborate ceremony to shame the [796] [626]

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

586 husband or wife who destroyed a marriage by deserting his, or her, partner for a lover. One informant, aged about seventy, twice took part in this rite when a young man, but probably did not know the full details of it. He stated that it followed a divorce of two persons who had been married with full ceremony, whereas another, slightly younger informant, who remembered having seen the ceremony once when a mere lad, believed that it was only in the families of commoners. It appears certain that the rite has not been practised since about 1880, consequently there is an element of doubt as to the actual details, and even as to whether it was an affair of chiefs or commoners. It is probable that it was among the former.

When a woman deserted her husband one of the leading chiefs would take this opportunity of giving a ceremony of the type known as *ɬaiyäkam*.[10] After consulting with his fellows to ensure that no one had any objections, and rarely including the deserted husband, he summoned the singers to his house. He would tell them his plans, and they would prepare the songs for the occasion. Five or six were always composed, with an effort to include as many foul remarks and allusions as possible, particularly with regard to the organs of the woman and her lover.

The singers spent about a week composing the songs, and meanwhile the chief who was giving the ceremony prepared food and made other necessary arrangements. When these were ready, the donor invited to his house all the members of the *sisaok* and *kusiut* societies for a rehearsal. The singers sang over the airs for the instruction of the guests. They were always worded as if it were the deserted husband speaking in foul terms of his ex-wife. The theme of one was:

"My wife has pudenda like those of a black bear."

The guests joined in the singing and also supplied foul themes by calling out observations about the organs of women in general, and of the deserting wife in particular. The singers

[10] The relation of this to the *a'alk* dance of the same name is obscure, cf. I, p. 279.

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

tried to incorporate as many of these as possible, so that the rite soon became a chorus of obscenities. The songs were sung and resung until all present were familiar with them, then the donor of the rite distributed food and all departed.

The following afternoon everyone, including those uninitiated into either society, were invited to the donor's house. Probably the only absentees from the village were the deserting wife and her lover, while guests from neighbouring settlements were often in attendance. On this occasion, for the first time, the deserted husband used to take the leading part. When the singers struck up the tune of the first song, he used to appear, supported by four or five assistants. His face was blackened with soot, he wore a lynx-skin belt, and above his head was fashioned some insulting object, usually a representation of the female organs made of wood, cedar-bark and berries, as realistic as possible. As the singers sang, aided by those who had learnt the songs on the previous day, the husband danced, moving his body so that the ornament on top of his head was shaken suggestively. Meanwhile the spectators kept calling out filthy epithets of any kind on his ex-wife and her lover. Sometimes the dancer was able to insert some obscene remarks into the display. On one occasion, for example, he pulled some lynx fur from his belt and threw it in the face of a *Täl·io* man who happened to be present, and who had once seduced a married woman and accordingly been the butt of a similar rite, with the remark:

"All *Täl·io* women have hairy pudenda like that."

The guests were invited to suggest foul nick-names for the man with whom the dancer's wife had eloped. One of these was adopted by general agreement of opinion, and the man was commonly called by it henceforth. Two names so created were:

Skulsos, "The One Whose Face is Wrinkled like a Woman's Organs," and,

Emoisaik, "The One Who Cohabited Publicly."

1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

One very old man is still, 1923, commonly called by this last designation, much to his annoyance.

When the songs had been sung, each accompanied by the dancing of the deserted husband, the donor of the ceremony distributed food and the guests departed. The only advantage to the giver of the rite was that it enabled him to show his wealth in an apparently disinterested fashion by gifts of food. Usually he was a friend of the aggrieved husband.

When a husband deserted his wife, the other women of the village used to perform an exactly similar ceremony. The same type of songs were composed, and during their singing the deserted wife used to dance, wearing above her head representations of a penis and testicles. By means of hidden strings she was able to cause the former to become erect.

On other occasions the ceremony was varied by an announcer asking the offended party about the appearance of the deserter. There followed a minute and highly coloured description about the unpleasantness of his genital organs, a description which was swiftly incorporated into the songs.

It can be taken as a matter of course that the above description is little more than an outline of the Bella Coola ceremony of shaming. In spite of its deficiencies, it is important, as evidence of the former sentiment with regard to divorce. Obscene though the ceremony must have been, both in acting and in the free use of personalities, it must have been a powerful deterrent to divorce.[11] Indeed it would be difficult to imagine a stronger one in a community where a man's position is judged by public opinion and where his greatest aversion is to public ridicule. It is unfortunate that we shall probably never know whether the rite was associated with chiefs or commoners.

CEREMONIAL MARRIAGE

Since marriage gains much of its importance from the complicated business transactions between the two families, with

[11] A similar rite was occasionally carried out for unmarried mothers.

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

blankets" for the child. The advantages to the donors were that they had an opportunity of showing their dignity, and it would always be a mark of pride for the child to be able to boast of the way in which she had been "held." 556 608 858

Ceremonial marriage clearly demonstrates two strong Bella Coola characteristics; namely, the desire publicly to enter into financial undertakings to demonstrate the wealth of the contracting party, and the desire to increase the prestige of children by means of this wealth expended indirectly on their behalf.

EXTRA-MARITAL RELATIONS

Although the Bella Coola do not regard marriage primarily as a means of regulating relations between the sexes, yet the connection between the two is sufficiently close to warrant description in this chapter. A man considers intercourse as one of the normal phenomena of life: by marrying he has exclusive rights to his wife, but few moral restraints deter him from anyone else to whom he can gain access without infringing the prerogatives of some other husband. Moreover, sexual intercourse is not regarded solely as a gratification of desires; it has a significance which can be described, not inaptly, as holy. As already explained, two favourite methods of obtaining success in any undertaking are by preserving lengthy continence or by observing ceremonial chastity. If a young unmarried man or widower should wish to make use of this latter means, he is compelled to have relations with a woman to whom he has no just claims. This is universally recognized, nor is there the slightest odium attached to the man. The only essential is that he neither violate another's wife, nor force a young girl against her will. 581 831 837

At the present time there is great laxity in Bella Coola, a condition which makes it difficult to judge the state of affairs in former times. Every effort was made to obtain satisfactory evidence, and the following was verified and re-verified with the older men. [128]

A wife, properly married with full ceremony, was usually 837 839

1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

837 [839] 622 836

faithful and cases of rape were either unknown or very rare. The daughters of chiefs, too, were guarded with great care and any effort to seduce one of them would be punished by her father. The parents of a girl used to watch her carefully, and the opportunity for immorality was not great in the days when everyone went to bed at sundown except on the occasion of a ceremonial dance. As one informant described it:

"The daughters of chiefs used to be looked after as if they were in boxes, cherished and guarded by their parents and relatives. No one would dream of molesting them. And a chief's daughter used to be proud and look after herself. Nowadays, girls don't care, and everything has become degraded."

[586] If the daughter of a chief did demean herself, the parents lost interest in her, as one who was spoilt. It was always assumed that a girl of rank was a virgin at marriage, and if it was discovered that she had been living an immoral life, her husband in many cases returned her in disgrace to her parents who, equally shamed, were expected to send back to him the goods he had expended for their daughter. Loss of virtue was judged only from indirect information. If the daughter of a chief was found pregnant before marriage, she was almost ostracized by her family. No ceremonial marriage could be arranged for her, and the child could not be cleansed from the stigma of illegitimacy.

622 848

836 567 [431]

On the other hand, it appears certain that there was a good deal of intercourse in the old days between chiefs and slave women, or even between slaves and the daughters of chiefs. In the latter case the woman was often cast aside by her relatives though they sometimes yielded to the inevitable and tried to wash away the disgrace with gifts. At the same time, public opinion was unfavourable to a man who consorted with many women, or to a woman who allowed herself to be at the disposal of many men. Any regular union of masters with their slave women for the deliberate purpose of having children was unknown. A girl's consent was always necessary, given either personally or through an intermediary. Even a chief hesitated